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Trojan War: Honorable or Evil?

While it may come off as slightly suspicious now, a gift of an enormous wooden horse was the peace offering to end all peace offerings in pre-Dark Age Troy. While this is likely a myth, the Trojan war was a dark war of brutal violence and legendary heroes. The Trojan War was a war between the Myceneans and Trojans, and its stories were carried on for centuries via oral tradition before they were finally written down in text. These texts have been saved as some of the classics of English literature, namely the *Iliad*. The *Iliad*, by Homer, details the Greek victory over the Trojans in the form of an epic poem. This is quite different from Euripides' *Women of Troy*, a play describing the effect that the war had on the female citizens of Troy. These two pieces, despite having some significant differences, each make strong arguments on war and the Trojan War. The characterization employed by Homer in the *Iliad* expresses a positive connotation of war, while Euripides characterizes the leads in the *Women of Troy* to express a negative connotation of war, which reflects the political standpoint of their authors at the time.

Homer's *Iliad* gives honor to all of the warriors in the *Iliad* to create a tone which supports the concept of war. Homer does not isolate his positive characterization to just the Myceneans from whom he hails, as the Trojans warriors receive their own share of praise. One strong example of a Trojan portrayed honorably is Hector. When Hector realized that he may have to die on the battlefield, he accepts his inevitable death and works to save his family from the impending grief. He says, "Poor Andromache! Why does your heart sorrow so much for me?"

No man is going to hurl me to Hades...”(Homer 9). Hector is being honorable here by trying to protect his family from any strife created by the war. Hector acts as the man of his house by comforting his family, a move that was honorable in the ancient Trojan society. Hector’s honorable actions with his family are but one example of characters honorably serving in war in the *Iliad*. Hector also instills honor in his fellow Trojan fighters. When the Myceneans were charging the Trojans after being rallied, Hector tells his men, “[y]ou high-hearted Trojans and far-renowned companions, be men now, dear friends, and remember your furious valor...”(3). Hector tells the soldiers that fighting against the rallying Greeks will make them “men,” and to fight with “furious valor”. Homer, through Hector, is telling the reader that fighting for one’s country gives one honor. Homer repeatedly uses characters to show that war is a place of honor, which creates an overall pro-war tone. This is clear when the strong warriors are compared with weak fighters. The warriors, such as Hector, Achilles, and Odysseus, have been shown to act honorably in the face of battle, with their families, and on the front line. However, when a captured Trojan asks to be taken prisoner instead of killed on the battlefield, Homer expresses his distaste for this dishonorable action through Agamemnon, one of the main heroes of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon prevents their peaceful capture of any Trojan in this scene, citing how dishonorable it would be to protect the ones who killed their fellow warriors(Homer 2). Homer uses Agamemnon to draw the line between honor and dishonor. This solidifies the pro-war tone, because of the created connection between honor and war. Homer glorifies war in the *Iliad* through his use of pro-war tone.

Euripides does not support war, as evident through grieving tone in *Women of Troy*. *Women of Troy* stresses the negative effects of war by depicting Trojan women after the Trojan war was lost. An example of the grief the women felt can be seen through Andromache’s

suffering: “O darling child, prized at too great a worth to live! You die, at enemy hands, and leave me desolate” (Euripides 8). Andromache said this as she learned that her infant son Astyanax must be taken away to be killed. She is overcome with grief having received the news, feeling “desolate”. The grief of a mother with a dead son is a common theme within *Women of Troy*, impacting the tone so that it is significantly more anti-war. The stressing of the death of children resulting from war creates a negative feeling in the mind of the reader when one thinks about war. This is continued further as Euripides also has women enslaved in *Women of Troy*. The Greek messenger tells Hecabe that the Myceneans have made all the Trojan women concubines, including her sworn-virgin daughter and herself. Hecabe is distraught after receiving the news, finding that Odysseus would be her new master, despite being royalty in Troy. Euripides uses the all-female chorus as another device to further his anti-war point. The wails of the chorus and anguish which they were intended to portray provides a grieving mood to a live performance, as the play was intended to be observed. The women are included to more-convincingly present grief than any plain piece of text, a device Euripides effectively utilizes. The tone of *Women of Troy* fabricates war as a monstrous entity that enslaves women and kills babies. Euripides uses human suffering and death to illustrate how terrible war is.

The authors of *Iliad* and *Women of Troy* use their opinion on war to express their political stance on the Trojan War. Both authors had strong views on the Trojan War. Homer used his positive stance on war to illustrate his support for the Myceneans. This is apparent with Homer’s use of epithets. Homer characterizes the Greek heroes with descriptors such as “Akamas, the huge and mighty”(1), “powerful Agamemnon”(2), and “valiant Bellephrontes”(4). Homer uses strong adjectives to characterize the Greek heroes to portray them in the best light possible. His positive stance on war, clear through his tone and descriptions of characters, provides the

grounds for Homer to support the victorious Myceneans. Homer describes the warriors with traits including “huge” and “mighty” to shift the tone of the *Iliad* to pro-Greek. Euripides uses a similar tactic to support the Trojans in *Women of Troy*. Euripides has his main characters, the trojan women, feel much grief and suffering, making the reader feel sorry for them. Cassandra, the “consecrated virgin”(Euripides 4), shows this when she is sent away as a concubine to King Agamemnon. The target audience being ancient polytheists, the idea that a woman committed to the god Apollo must be taken away as a sex slave is terrible. This would have been at least upsetting to anyone who watched it. Euripides uses examples full of pathos to show his support for the Trojans in *Women of Troy*. He makes the reader feel sorry for the Trojans, therefore aligning the reader against the Greek side. Together, Homer and Euripides use their opinions of war expressed in their respected pieces to portray their support for opposite ends of the political spectrum regarding the Trojan War.

While Homer uses The *Illiad* to illustrate a positive view of war, Euripudes uses *Women of Troy* to negatively represent war, and these opinions reveal the political motivations of the two authors. The *Iliad*, the poem of the victors, portrays the honor to be gained in war, and just how honorable that makes the Myceneans. Homer directly supports them in this manner, as well as supporting the general concept of war. Quite the opposite in the *Women of Troy*, where Euripides knocks on the idea of war, enlightening the reader with a description of its evils. These evils are used to elicit emotion from the reader to back the Trojans. While both written about the same war, the two pieces express directly opposite views because of which side they support. This visible bias is important. While the *Iliad* is famous, as are the heroes within, *Women of Troy* shows what evil those heroes did. It is important to understand the bias within a given piece of

literature, to get an understanding of what is factual and what is an opinion. The Iliad is an example of history being written by the victor, and history remembers the Greeks as heroes.